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The "Truth" about the Bigfoot Legend

LINDA MILLIGAN

The ambiguity inherent in belief legends makes it all but impossible for the folklorist to presume to know the "truth" about Bigfoot. Such assertions are likely to be at the root subjective, and they draw folklorists into the legend debate, a process they would do better to observe than to participate in. Observations of the debate process within culture can reveal a great deal about the Bigfoot legend. One can better understand how emergent beliefs become legend in a contemporary context and how traditional beliefs withstand challenges even in a dynamic, information-filled setting.

The debate within culture is occurring on two levels: in the published writings of Bigfoot researchers and in the memorates and conjectures of ordinary people who are especially interested in Bigfoot. The second part of this paper briefly describes the debate about Bigfoot's nature as reflected in the popular press. The third part examines the extent to which the published debate has influenced the thinking of active bearers of the legend in Central Ohio and the memorates they tell.

In his article "Humanoids and Anomalous Lights: Taxonomic and Epistemological Problems," David Hufford argues that it is possible that some reports of Bigfoot may not be legend at all; rather, some might be reports based on what he terms an "objectively real referent" that sometimes becomes embedded in a traditional narrative and sometimes not. Hufford asserts that "large hair-covered bipeds" reported in different parts of the world under a variety of names might actually exist. Accounts of Bigfoot's size and appearance are quite similar across the United States and Canada, according to Hufford.

My thanks to Bill Ellis for sharing his material on Bigfoot with me.

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His fieldwork demonstrates that this consistency cannot always be explained through tradition since many of his informants were unaware of traditional accounts elsewhere and even were ignorant of the various names given the creature. In many instances, the accounts he collected neither alluded to traditional materials nor were told with these materials' characteristic elaboration. Rather, he writes, they resembled "simple facts accurately reported."

Hufford argues then that it is plausible that Bigfoot exists. Distribution of the reports across the North American continent and in other parts of the world may indicate widespread observation of the creature. It is also plausible, he points out, that the creature is the subject of a tradition that is far more widespread and far more conservative than folklorists recognize. In any case, Hufford warns folklorists not to explain the accounts purely in psychological terms. Such an assumption might prove to be, in his words, "the same kind of embarrassing error" that led 18th century astronomers, unaware of meteorites, to discount reports by farmers who observed hot boulders falling into their fields (Hufford 1977, 237–239).

The "truth" then about whether or not Bigfoot exists is as yet disputable. Folklorists can shed some light on the subject. Hufford's objective analysis demonstrates the plausibility for Bigfoot's existence. But demonstrating plausibility and proving that it is so are very different. Folklorists cannot provide the kind of evidence necessary to prove the existence of Bigfoot (or other entities whose existence is disputed) to those who are not already convinced. We collect, investigate, and analyze texts, not Bigfoot carcasses, crashed extraterrestrial spacecraft, or bottle ghosts. While folklorists can discern some truths from these texts, the absolute truth about the core belief is no shining pearl that we can make emerge. That pearl remains obscure. Truth in most instances becomes a matter of faith not fact.

According to Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, the essence of belief legend is this very dispute over a truth which remains veiled. " 'Real' folk legend," according to Dégh and Vázsonyi must "produce a reason and feasibility to profess faith, to take a stand for or against belief" (1973, 7). Belief legend then is a dispute about belief.

Folklorists who take a position for or against belief are entering this dispute and therefore participating in the legend process. When a legend is socially dysfunctional, that may seem the right thing to do. But I think it is questionable whether folklorists' assertions, however reasonable they may seem, can effectively resolve the dispute without

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being grounded in indisputable evidence. Such objective proof is seldom available, as Dégh and Vázsonyi point out, "because of the nature of legend situations" (1973, 13). And there is a danger in folklorists mistaking what they themselves believe to be true as "fact." They may assume, for example, that an informant's narrative has no basis in reality when in fact it does. According to Hufford, such assumptions, untested, are tantamount to "imposing on us a set of blinders" (1977, 234). The term "blinders" implies an inability to accurately observe, a limitation that could seriously undermine our work.

The "truth" about Bigfoot for the time being is no more available to folklorists than to anyone else. But because our fieldwork puts us into direct contact with nonbelievers as well as believers, it is difficult to sit on the sidelines watching the two groups pelt each other. We sometimes are drawn in, and in such a polarized environment risk being misinterpreted: those who believe may feel that not to believe as they do is to disbelieve. Standing there in the middle of the ruckus, we might get pelted ourselves, and shout to each other, "How do I handle this?!" My answer is to hold your ground and duck when necessary.

In the middle of the dispute, not on one or the other side or outside it all together, is the best place to be to observe the legend process. From this vantage point one might not learn the "truth" about Bigfoot, but one might learn quite a bit about the Bigfoot legend.

If folklorists are to maintain this middle ground, they must resist the temptation to try to resolve the ambiguity inherent in the belief legend with explanations that don't take into account all the evidence. Furthermore, folklorists should recognize that the evidence is ambiguous. If it were not—if it were clear and indisputable—there would be no legend.

The evidence is ambiguous because it is difficult to verify and because it is often accompanied by negative evidence. In the case of Bigfoot the positive evidence is usually the personal testimonies of witnesses. These are often accompanied by reports of Bigfoot's unique scream and odor, by photographs and plaster casts of footprints, by hair and feces samples. There is negative evidence as well. If all the personal testimonies are true, and Bigfoot inhabits all of North America, how could this creature have eluded forest rangers, zoologists, and Bigfoot hunters for all of these years? And why have no carcasses or bones been found?

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The sum of the evidence for and against the creature's existence taken together defies easy answers. Explanations that all but ignore part of the evidence may require a stretch of the imagination as great or greater than anything collected in the field, as in the conclusion of the article "Abominable Snowman or Bigfoot: A Psychoanalytic Search for the Origin of Yeti and Sasquatch Tales" by Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries:

> In the foregoing analysis we have suggested that the sightings of sasquatch and yeti are most likely of a delusionary, illusionary and hallucinatory nature and, as such, the projections of conflicting images of people living in isolated environments under conditions of severe stress. The actual presence of bears and apes probably played a major role in the creation of these creatures considering the process of condensation and distortion operating in dreams, delusions, and hallucinations. Many rituals and tales dealing with apes and bears support this contention. We have emphasized the great similarities in mental processes among children and primitive man and have used this to explain these institutionalized animal-like phobias. We do, however, also realize that many of the more recent sightings of these creatures (especially in the case of sasquatch), have been made by 'modern' man. We suggest, that in these instances, conditions of severe stress mobilized defenses and subsequently more primitive psychological processes became operational. Sometimes the behavior of primitive and modern man seems to be not far apart.
>
> One aspect of the yeti and sasquatch that remains difficult to explain, is the extraordinarily large number of sighted footprints. The geographical distribution of the tracks and the difficulty in making these tracks cannot easily be ignored. Apart from a real hoax, one hypothesis about this phenomenon could be that some individuals, in an attempt to master their fears of such strange creatures, are engaged in a total identification process. Imitation and impersonation becomes a consequence. It may explain the presence of these gigantic footprints (de Vries 1982, 260).

One could accuse de Vries of legend making. In place of Bigfoot he has substituted a contemporary "wild man"; that is, a human who devises a costume, not to hoax but to totally assume the identity of Bigfoot. Such psychological aberrations do occur. Stan Gordon, Director of the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained and psychiatrist Berthold Eric Schwarz investigated a case in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1973 in which a young man was so frightened by Bigfoot-like creatures that he seemed to go through the process of identification and impersonation described by de Vries. He became hysterical at the site where he and his young brothers

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observed a glowing ball of light hovering just above two ape-like creatures. As police, investigators, the brothers and their father searched the area for evidence hours after the sighting, the young man became hysterical, then began growling like an animal and tossed his father and one of the investigators to the ground (Clark and Coleman 1978, 97–103). It should be noted, however, that the young man's animal-like behavior was temporary. Such behavior would have to be widespread and far more sustained to account for the footprints found across the continent. I suspect that if such "wild men" exist in numbers, more evidence for them would exist at least in the form of contemporary memorates.

The kind of hypothesis put forth by de Vries illuminates nothing. It merely serves to dismiss evidence that contradicts his argument that the large, hairy ape-like creatures reported are hallucinations. Although the personal testimonies and footprints are not sufficient to prove that this elusive creature exists in the mountains, woodlands, and farmlands of North America, the hallucination hypothesis cannot be proved either. The evidence is simply too ambiguous. Folklorists must resist the temptation to resolve this ambiguity by substituting what could become one folk narrative for another. Boiled down to its simplest language, what de Vries says to those who claim the experience is, "I don't believe you. You are seeing things." While that is a legitimate personal response, to legitimize it academically requires fairly taking into account all the evidence. Because of the ambiguous nature of the evidence for and against Bigfoot, conclusions drawn about the nature of the belief are likely to be highly speculative and nonproductive.

Those who research evidence for Bigfoot are aware of its ambiguity, so they themselves often debate whether the creature actually exists, where it resides, and what its nature is. Rather than attempt to resolve this debate, I have chosen instead to focus on the Bigfoot debate itself, in an effort to increase our understanding of the legend process. The essence of the legend is debate, so if we see how proponents of the active Bigfoot legend conduct themselves, we can see how the legend changes, how speculation enters into the process, and how (if at all) it affects memorates—or how people actually experience Bigfoot. This, I believe is the great opportunity that the study of contemporary legends offers folklorists.

According to David Hufford, Bigfoot-like creatures were first reported in the West in 1921 when Lt.-Col. Howard Bury, following a failed attempt to climb to the top of Mt. Everest, described to report-

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ers a large, upright animal seen in the Himalayas by some members of his party. One reporter researched Bury's story and discovered further accounts among people who lived in the region of a fur covered, man-like animal (Hufford 1977, 235). Ivan T. Sanderson writes that the term adopted by the media for the creature, "abominable snowman" was born from a misinterpretation of the term the locals gave to the creature (Sanderson 1961, 10–11). Before this date there had been scattered newspaper accounts of hair-covered, human-like monsters or "wild men" in America as well as stories of similar creatures among some North American Indians. But David Hufford, I believe, is correct in his assertion that widespread knowledge of such creatures originated with press accounts of the Himalayan abominable snowman. Janet and Colin Bord report in *The Bigfoot Casebook* that there are only a few North American Bigfoot accounts available for the first four decades of this century as compared to the number of reports today. They reason that there may have been as many sightings but that people were more isolated and did not know to whom to take these reports (Bord 1982, 31). Whether or not there were as many sightings, these early accounts of "wild men," "mountain devils," and "man-apes" likely created fertile soil for Bigfoot stories to thrive once press accounts of the Himalayan abominable snowman piqued the public's interest. Today Bigfoot is reported all over the United States and Canada.

The description of the creature is fairly stable. It is a hairy ape-like creature who stands between seven and eight feet tall. It is reported to have a foul odor and a loud scream (Green 1978). Descriptive details sometimes vary. It is reported by some to have reddish brown hair and by others to have dark gray hair. Some witnesses claim that its eyes are red or glowing. The massive size and depth of its footprints attest to its size, but sometimes these footprints reveal five toes and at other times three toes. Generally the creature is described as being reclusive and not a danger to humans, but sometimes it is reported to have invaded human territory or behaved quite aggressively (Bord 1982). John Green writes in *Sasquatch: The Apes Among Us* that the Himalayan abominable snowman is actually a yeti, which is smaller and less erect that the North American sasquatch or Bigfoot.

Bigfoot researchers disagree about the sasquatch's and yeti's habitat. Frank Poirier, Professor of Anthropology at The Ohio State University, doubts that the creature exists in Ohio or North America but

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believes there is a possibility that it exists in Asia, where it was first reported. Poirier and others believe Bigfoot could be related to Gigantopithecus, a very large ape that existed more than 100,000 years ago (T. C. Brown 1988). John Green, on the other hand, writes that there is far more evidence for the North American Bigfoot that is more convincing than what he terms the "second-rate evidence" available for the Himalayan yeti (Green 1978, 132). Bigfoot hunter Bob Gardiner, who formed the North American Sasquatch Research Team in Columbus, Ohio in 1974 thinks the North American accounts quite plausible and has organized expeditions in Ohio to seek the creature out. Gardiner has no intentions of shooting the creature because he believes Bigfoot is more human than animal. John Green notes that Ohio has been "quite productive for reports compared to other areas" (T. C. Brown 1988). Kenneth Wylie takes a very different view in *Bigfoot: A Personal Inquiry into a Phenomenon*. Wylie writes that there simply is not enough evidence to support Bigfoot's existence anywhere except in the imaginations of people who long for something left in nature that has not yet been subdued or classified. He concludes that "when we seek the great, hairy beast, a new quest is possible, something unknown still survives . . ." (Wylie 1980, 230).

Up until the early 1970's the debate about Bigfoot's nature centered on whether or not it was an ancient ape, a human-like creature, or an ape-man. But as early as 1968 accounts emerged linking Bigfoot to UFOs. Janet and Colin Bord report that witnesses in Salem, Ohio saw "a large, shadowy, man-like creatures," "a large cat-like creature," and a UFO near their home (Bord 1982, 92). In the 1970's similar reports proliferated particularly in Pennsylvania.

Stan Gordon, Director of the Pennsylvania Association for the study of the Unexplained writes that in 1973 Pennsylvania experienced its largest wave of Bigfoot sightings, with over 100 documented reports involving 250 eyewitnesses. Gordon's group notes that in many instances UFOs were reported in the same area shortly before the creature was sighted. The suspected link was confirmed in the case (briefly described earlier) where a young man, along with his young brothers, saw two Bigfoot-like creatures standing just below a hovering UFO. Gordon believes the two phenomena are linked, although he is not certain how (Gordon 1982, 3).

A new theory about the nature of Bigfoot proposed by Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman emerged out of this linkage concept. Clark

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and Coleman write that Bigfoot, UFOs, psychic phenomena, apparitions, the eastern panther, and poltergeists are all what they term"borderline phenomena" (Clark & Coleman 1978, 19). They write:

> Whatever the source may be, its signals must be filtered through human consciousness and perception, which shape the manifestations to conform to certain archetypal forms that are both strange and yet oddly familiar to us. Strange because they appear supernatural or extraterrestrial, but familiar because, in a sense, *we have created them* (Clark & Coleman 1978, 20).

They conclude that these borderline phenomena are not hallucinations but are a kind of "phantasm" that is "generated by a single paranormal mechanism" and then processed through the human mind. What the generating mechanism is is unknown. But Clark and Coleman write that the archetypal images produced by this process, Bigfoot, UFOs, and others, indirectly speak to us about ourselves. This dialogue may ultimately alter our perception of the universe (Clark & Coleman 1978, 195–207).

Clark and Coleman's theory in part is an effort to explain phenomena that to them make no sense. They argue that common sense dictates that the large numbers of sane people who report these "manifestations" could not all be seeing things. Yet they ask, ". . . why if they are real, are there no bodies, no bones, no live specimens locked securely in zoos and laboratories? Why only certain kinds of physical evidence, invariably of a somewhat ambiguous nature—footprints, strands of hair or fur, possible feces samples, and not others?" (Clark & Coleman 1978, 21–22).

Clark and Coleman's theory met with skepticism among some Bigfoot investigators. John Green retorts:

> . . . I have no inclination whatever to consider U.F.O.'s as part of the explanation for anything on Earth. To people who are convinced of the reality of space craft and space visitors, I suppose it is natural to think of them as a possible answer to the problem of something seen on Earth that isn't supposed to be here.
>
> The same goes, I presume, for people who are convinced that there are other forms of reality on Earth with which we normally have no contact. They may well find it entirely satisfactory to assume that a creature that man can see but hasn't been able to catch or kill just steps across some borderline that takes it beyond the contact of man's sight, touch and hearing. Having no way of understanding the universe, or the existence of life, or so many other things that do appear real to me, I am certainly not about to argue that reality contains only the things

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> that register on my five senses. But with the sasquatch I see no need to fall back on either extra-terrestrial or extra-sensory explanations. Considering the consistent resistance our society maintains to any exposure to information on the subject, our failure to have stumbled on proof of their existence, while considerably against the odds, doesn't seem to me to require unearthly explanation (Green 1978, 257).

Clark now disavows much of what he speculated in *Creatures of the Outer Edge*, saying to me in a telephone conversation that while there is a tendency to want to link things together, there has not been enough evidence to support those links. He is still intrigued by the case of the young man who observed the Bigfoot-like creatures beneath the UFO. But Clark uses the word "mixology" to describe the error he committed in his book. The term was coined by Richard Hall, who admonishes "linkologists":

> If persons inexperienced in scientific methods would be "ufologists," they must learn not to assume a priori that a UFOlink exists, with [cattle] mutilations, Bigfoot, the Bermuda Triangle or anything else. They must learn to be critical of their own assumptions, not merely cite selective data in an attempt to support what they already believe or think may be true. What you think may be true, after careful consideration of data, is a hypothesis. It is a starting point for investigation, not a scientific conclusion (Hall 1985, 6).

The debate among investigators over the Bigfoot-UFO link illustrates the difficulty proponents of Bigfoot have had coping with the ambiguity of the evidence. Clark and Coleman quote Dr. J. Allen Hynek as describing the evidence as an "embarrassment of riches." They continue, "the physical evidence is always just enough to suggest that the reported manifestation was not purely hallucinatory; it is never enough to prove that it was objectively real" (Clark & Coleman 1978, 195–196). The link debate also shows how proponents engage in group self-criticism. And it offers the folklorist an opportunity to investigate the extent to which these conjectures, accounts, theories, and criticism of theories in print influence the texts collected in the field.

Bigfoot lore is usually communicated in memorates. But these memorates are only one part of a communication process that may include the sharing of photographs, drawings, plaster casts, hair samples, beliefs, and speculation. Such sharing took place at the home of Reverend B., who lives in a small, rural community about 30 miles

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northwest of Columbus where he is the pastor of a small, non-denominational church, a free-lance newspaper reporter, and a Bigfoot hunter. Using his scrapbook of photographs and drawings to guide the conversation, Reverend B. recounted the cases he investigated of surprise encounters between Bigfoot and humans.

He told me about a small group of game hunters who when they spotted the creature in the woods were so frightened that they backed out of the woods with their rifles pointed and cocked in shooting position. One of these brave coon hunters made the mistake of describing the event to the Reverend, who said to me that he likes "to torment" the fellow "that he probably backed all the way home." Reverend B. also told me about a birthday party surprise encounter with Bigfoot. Evidently a family gathering took place to celebrate the birthday of an East Liberty, Ohio man. His family pooled their resources to buy him an easy chair. The evening of the party the man's mother asked him to recline in the chair that had been placed in front of a picture window so that she might take a photograph of him enjoying his new gift. The man leaned back in the chair with his feet up as his mother focused the camera. When she looked through the viewfinder she saw a pair of eyes looking through the picture window behind her son. She snapped the camera, and although the glare from the glass distorted the photo of Bigfoot, according to Reverend B., it is the best picture of the creature he has collected. Family members have told the Reverend that since then, the creature has visited their home many times: now the family "almost feel as if it's a pet."

These two memorates illustrate the surprise encounter motif ever-present in Bigfoot accounts. No one, it seems, ever successfully tracks Bigfoot. Those who encounter the creature seem always to be taken by surprise. The humor in these memorates does more than poke fun at the fearless coon hunter and those who would think of Bigfoot as their family pet; it emphasizes that from the Reverend's point of view Bigfoot need not be feared.

During my conversation with the Reverend, these memorates were interspersed with discussions of photographs of footprints and a composite drawing of the creature he made based on the eyewitness reports he collected. He showed me a sample of Bigfoot hair. He described to me what he has learned about the creature's habits after years of tracking it. But he would always go back to the memorates; more than anything, they are the evidence. And the sheer numbers

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Reverend B. has collected from rural and small town people that he trusts makes that evidence for him indisputable. From these memorates, both a physical and psychological portrait of the creature emerges. The following memorates communicate Bigfoot's size, smell, vocal capacity, and fear.

A farmer in the vicinity heard noises outside his home around eleven in the evening. Suspecting that it was the same culprit who had recently siphoned gas from his tank coming back for more, he slipped quietly out of his back door hoping to catch the thief in the act. Instead, he saw Bigfoot standing in his driveway, only about 50 feet from where the farmer stood, lighted from behind by the security lamp on the barn. The farmer's Siberian Husky was on a chain that could reach halfway between the farmer and the creature. Bigfoot was lunging at the dog as if to tease it. Eventually the farmer thought to turn on his back porch light to get a better look at it. But the light frightened the creature, who left in such haste that he ran into a maple tree. The farmer said it shook the whole tree and broke branches where it hit. The farmer called Reverend B. to the scene, and they measured the highest branch that was broken off. It measured eight feet one inch from the ground.

The portrait painted here is of a massive creature who has the courage to tease a chained dog but who runs away in terror at the sight of a human. The following memorate, narrated by Reverend B., also illustrates Bigfoot's terror.

> *Reverend B.:* . . . then right out here, uh, they were woken up one night, and the smell got so strong in the bedroom that it . . . they were awakened by it. And they went out on the porch then to see if they could see anything. They went out on the front porch, a man and his wife, see if they could see anything. And there was a storm coming up. And some lightning flashes, you know, and all of that. And pretty soon it got a little bit closer. And pretty soon there was a big flash of lightning, you know, and a big clap of thunder. And that thing threw the biggest pitch you could imagine back there in that woods. There's just one small field between the woods and their house. Said, "It's sounding like he's tearing the whole woods up."
>
> *Linda:* Was he afraid of the thunder and lightning?
>
> *Reverend B.:* Sounds like it. Sounds like it. And I've got that kind of a story, you know, a time or two about, uh, harsh noises seem to frighten them. He said he just thrashed around back there in those bushes and screamed at that thunder and lightning like you couldn't believe.

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Through recounting memorates collected from witnesses, Reverend B. paints a multi-dimensional portrait of Bigfoot that communicates far more than the hair samples or photographs of footprints. He is convinced of the creature's existence and wastes little time in debating that point. Instead he devotes his effort at trying to understand its nature. For the Reverend, the memorates provide much of the empirical data that he draws upon. Retelling these memorates to others through face to face contact or in the news accounts he writes for the local paper, he communicates what he has learned.

Reverend B. was only one member of a loose network of people engaged in Bigfoot research, but he was considered to have the most expertise. Many of the others were involved in UFO research as well. In fact, some of them became involved in Bigfoot research only because they believed that a link exists between Bigfoot and UFOs.

While the group argued for the existence of Bigfoot with memorates, photographs, and hair samples to outsiders like myself, I observed evidence of a more subtle, secondary debate over the nature of Bigfoot inside the group. In one instance, network members went so far as to debunk the claim of a fellow member. One of my informants told me that a woman who shares the group's interest in Bigfoot set up a feeding station in her backyard. According to a Dayton, Ohio, newspaper, the woman says she feeds dog food and deer meat to a group of Bigfeet that frequent the station (Balz 1985). John and Vicki, officers of a UFO group in a small, Central Ohio city, debunked her story. The context was a caution to me to be skeptical of people who claim multiple sightings of unusual phenomena:

> *John:* . . . It's like the little boy who cried wolf. After a while you can't believe anything they say. Uh, there's a lady that we've had some brief contact with, uh, through TEROCO. She firmly believes that she has Bigfoot in her backyard.
>
> *Vicki:* She has feeding stations, and she has Bigfoot "ka ka" [feces] in little zip lock bags that she has stored in her freezer next to her hamburger. So that if you want to analyze it . . .
>
> *Linda:* Well, has it been analyzed?
>
> *John:* Yes, well, I didn't have to analyze it. I know what it is. I've seen it before because I was raised in the country. It's raccoon "ka ka." [*laughter*] But she has all these little zip lock bags. And she's preserving this raccoon "ka ka" for, forever.

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Vicki: And she firmly believes though, that she has had Bigfoot coming to her house to this feeding station that she has set up for somewhat, fifteen years.

John: But they've never taken a picture of it. Now if Bigfoot is coming there, and they sit up night after night after night waiting for Bigfoot to come, it's kinda like kids who used to wait up for Santa. You'd wait there for Santa Claus, and you always fall asleep. Santa Claus always eats the damn cookies and drinks that milk. [*laughter*] And you never know what happens to him, but you know he had that cookies and milk cause it's gone.

The group did not make a practice of debunking one another. In fact, when pressed further Vicki recanted her opinion that there was nothing to the woman's claim, allowing for its possibility. Nonetheless, a debate over the nature and activity of Bigfoot was apparent.

This dispute also emerged at a meeting of the Extraterrestrial Researchers of Columbus, Ohio (TEROCO), the network's core. A participant, Don, argued that Bigfoot and UFOs are linked essentially because both had been sighted in an area of Ohio the group was currently investigating. Additionally, there had been sudden and unexplained power failures and reports of people behaving strangely in the woods. Therefore, Don concluded, all this activity is linked; and UFOs are responsible for it. Participants at this meeting pointed out that Bigfoot was far more intelligent than an ordinary animal and had psychic abilities. Don, in fact, suggested that Bigfoot hunter, Bob Gardiner, had failed to find the creature because he persists in hunting it as if it were only an animal.

But none of the group reported any memorates to support their contention that Bigfoot is an alien creature. In fact, memorates told by TEROCO member Peggy appear to contradict this notion. During an interview in her home Peggy described to me what happened the night her brother and several of his friends encountered Bigfoot.

Peggy: Uh, he and his wife, well, was just his girlfriend then, and a bunch of kids from school had went out to this place, that's probably about ten miles from here maybe fifteen. And uh, they had the car parked there, and they kept hearing weird noises. And they were out of the car, and then they heard something coming up out of the water. And, of course, they all ran for the car. Whatever it was really stunk because Bigfoot's got a special smell. And uh, anyway they got to the car, and he had a big Oldsmobile, a 98 I think it was. And when he started to take off, uh, Bigfoot grabbed the back of his bumper. And his

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car . . . he must have lifted the back end up because the car was in gear, and it was spinning and going no where. And uh, he'd, uh, Bigfoot had torn the license plate off the car.

Linda: Did he, did he see what. . . .

Peggy: Yeah, in the mirror he could see him. You know, it was real dark. But he could see the outline of something big and hairy. And uh, of course, everybody was screaming, you know, to get out of there. And uh, oh Chris has just got so many stories. And uh, the sheriff the next day or so, uh, after that . . . someone had turned in the license plate. They found it out there. With uh, bigfoot had pulled the big bumper, which, you know, it would take a lot of pressure to, uh, pull that bumper away from the car like that. But Bigfoot did it.

Peggy chose to emphasize Bigfoot's foul smell and his great strength. She also strongly implied that her brother and his friends were in danger and were fortunate to have escaped with only a missing bumper. Later in the interview, however, Peggy said she believed Bigfoot to be harmless, more intelligent than regular animals, and mentally communicating with extraterrestrial beings whose spacecraft are regularly observed in her community. She told no memorate to support this second view of Bigfoot, but it contrasts sharply with the Bigfoot in the memorate that she did tell, in which the creature is described as a kind of monster, reminiscent of King Kong, lurking near isolated roads in the dark night ready to spring upon humans. These two views of Bigfoot are contradictory and never reconciled. I believe they reflect the tension that exists between the established legend and a new form of the legend that may be emerging. This tension is more obvious in the comments of Reverend B., who was more conscious than Peggy that Bigfoot the animal is hard to reconcile with Bigfoot the alien.

I asked Reverend B. why people are connecting the two:

Reverend B.: Well, one thing you can't deny is the fact that, uh, much of the time the sightings of Bigfoot is accompanied by the sightings of UFOs. You can't deny that.

Linda: Have you had UFO sightings around here that correspond with it?

Reverend B.: Yes, uh huh. And uh, had two very excellent UFO sightings here in the last three and a half years, you know, since we started, uh, trying to learn what we can find out. And uh, over the same area. So you can't deny that, you know, that there isn't a possibility there. Although you can't place this real, this thing has a real foul odor to it.

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It smells bad, worse than a skunk, you know. And uh, you can oftentimes smell it for quite a distance. Now maybe, maybe not only does it smell bad, but maybe it has some of the capabilities of a skunk too, you know, being able to. . . . Maybe this is a protective device or a warning device of some kind too. But it smells, uh, real bad. And you cannot connect that with something that might be as highly scientific as a UFO, you know. Or the fact that uh, uh, it seems like it eats field mice and moles, rabbits, chickens, you know.

Stephanie: Something so big? Couldn't it eat something bigger like a cow or a pig?

Reverend B.: I suppose, but we don't run into that, not yet. Uh, eats a lot of fruit and berries and various forms, you know, of plant life and that kind of thing. And we find evidence of that. And that's not . . . you know when I think of somebody, uh, a creature out of a UFO, you think, uh, a person really that would, uh, be advanced maybe from what we are, but this thing is just. . . .

Linda: an animal.

Reverend B.: It acts animal. Its habits are animal.

For now the older, more established form of the Bigfoot legend coexists with an emergent belief. But they are not coequals since the emergent belief has not yet established itself in Central Ohio memorates. The lack of supporting memorates connecting Bigfoot with UFOs also indicates that the group did not derive this belief from available accounts of the creature in Central Ohio; the source is elsewhere. Stan Gordon is the major proponent of the link theory; he publishes and speaks on the topic, and conducts most of his investigations in Ohio's neighboring state, Pennsylvania. Clearly the group was influenced by Gordon and others who have written on the topic.

Members of the network were not influenced equally however. Even in this group, which shares many beliefs, subtle differences in systems of belief foster speculation and debate. Reverend B., although willing to entertain the theory, was less willing to adopt it than Peggy, Don, and some others. Don and Peggy attempt to reinterpret the legend while Reverend B. resists the new interpretation.

It is too soon to tell whether or not the emergent belief will become established legend. The lack of supporting memorates in Central Ohio suggests a resistance to change. The change from Bigfoot the animal to Bigfoot the alien could not simply be described as dynamic. Such a change would be radical and would invalidate much of what has become traditionally associated with the creature. Such a radical

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alteration of traditional belief would require compelling new first- and second-hand accounts as supporting evidence.

The "truth" about the Bigfoot legend reveals little about Bigfoot but considerably more about the legend process. Published theories can ignite debate, but speculative debate is not sufficient by itself to dramatically alter a legend. The traditional belief that Bigfoot is a terrestrial animal resists being invalidated. It would take a large number of compelling memorates to do so. Since there are none reported in Central Ohio linking Bigfoot to UFOs, one could argue either that people who provide accounts simply are not experiencing a Bigfoot/UFO connection, or that people's interpretations of their experience are so tradition bound that they cannot perceive a link even if it exists. In either case, without a large number of memorates linking Bigfoot and UFOs, the traditional belief that Bigfoot is an elusive, terrestrial animal is likely to win the debate; and the belief in a Bigfoot/UFO connection will eventually fade before ever having become a legend.

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